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COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS

Fifty-sixth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 38th MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Tuesday, 11 April 2000, at 10 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. SIMKHADA (Nepal)

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RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

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GE.00-12608 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

INTEGRATION OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS OF WOMEN AND THE GENDER PERSPECTIVE:

(a) VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN (agenda item 12) (continued) (E/CN.4/2000/66, 67, 68 and Add.1-5, 115, 128 and 131; E/CN.4/2000/118-E/CN.6/2000/8; E/CN.4/2000/NGO/42, 56, 65, 87, 119 and 145; E/CN.6/2000/6; E/CN.4/Sub.2/1999/14)

1. Ms. ZHANG (International Labour Organization (ILO)) said that the promotion of gender equality required an enabling environment in which all men and women could enjoy human rights. The rights-based approach should go hand-in-hand with the development-based approach, for sound development was based on social and economic progress.

2. Efforts were being made to strengthen the gender dimension in the follow-up to the Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, adopted by the International Labour Conference in June 1998. Efforts were also being made to promote the ratification and application of other conventions of relevance to women's rights.

3. One of the ILO priorities in its follow-up to the Beijing Platform for Action was the promotion of awareness of women workers' rights and legal literacy concerning them. Special importance had also been given to protecting the rights of those working outside the formal labour protection system, most of whom were women; empowering women by promoting their participation in setting the development agenda; promoting fairer representation in decision-making; and enabling workers to combine work and family life.

4. To meet the challenges of globalization, a process that for many implied greater insecurity and even marginalization, ILO had developed a strategic global programme on decent work, thereby placing gender equality and development issues at the heart of its agenda. Gender equality was a matter not only of rights and social justice but also of efficiency and good business sense.

5. Ms. CARRILLO (United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM)) said that, in its work on the integration of women's rights into United Nations activities system-wide, UNIFEM had been involved in substantive analysis of women's human rights and the gender-specific dimensions of human rights, in cooperation with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and in the development of expertise, training and advocacy for procedures to ensure accountability.

6. A coherent policy framework required a commitment to gender equality in all United Nations policies and programmes; the adoption of a gender perspective that analysed the effects of women's and men's social roles on their human rights; the incorporation of international legal standards relevant to women's human rights into the policy frameworks of United Nations bodies and funds; the routine inclusion of women's human rights in efforts to mainstream human rights in the context of United Nations reform; and systematic consideration

by United Nations human rights bodies of how gender discrimination restricted women's enjoyment of their human rights and how their human rights were shaped by the interplay of gender and factors such as race or socio-economic status.

7. Women's groups and other non-governmental organizations (NGOs) played a central role in integrating women's rights into human rights activities, notably by providing information to treaty bodies and special mechanisms and by their involvement in technical cooperation projects.

8. The Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, adopted in 1993, had been a landmark because it situated violence against women in a human rights context, enlarged the concept of violence against women to reflect the real conditions of women's lives, and pointed to the gender-based roots of such violence. UNIFEM welcomed the ground-breaking work of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women and hoped that the Commission would renew her mandate. UNIFEM would use her findings and recommendations to help in its own work of eliminating violence against women.

9. In 1998, UNIFEM had led a global inter-agency campaign on violence-free societies that had focused unprecedented attention on the need for joint efforts to eliminate violence against women. The violence experienced by women in wartime was part of a continuum that began at home, and UNIFEM was supporting work on gender-related issues in conflict situations in order to ensure the integration of women's interests into the procedures of the International Criminal Court.

10. Ms. TANGGAMA (Survival International) said that the Indonesian security forces continued to use violence and torture against women in West Papua, despite the recommendations made by the Special Rapporteur in the report on her mission to Indonesia (E/CN.4/1999/68/Add.3). Abuses against women had been taking place for over 30 years, and included killings, rape, torture, hard labour, arbitrary detention and mental oppression. Yet no perpetrators had been brought to trial and it seemed unlikely that any would be in the near future.

11. Women in detention, whatever their age, were treated like animals and, in 1998, the military had punished a peaceful demonstration by taking women out to sea on Indonesian navy ships, raping and sexually mutilating them and throwing them overboard. If bloodshed was to be avoided, the international community must urge Indonesia to enter into genuine dialogue with the people of West Papua. She called on the Commission to put pressure on the Indonesian Government, as a State party to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, to denounce discrimination against women, including discrimination through violence, in accordance with article 1 of the Convention.

12. Ms. FELIPE ALVES (Asian Buddhist Conference for Peace) said that, since the referendum in East Timor in August 1999, the Indonesian military and militias had subjected women to rape, torture, illegal detention, sexual harassment, summary executions and forced disappearances. Harassment and sexual violence still continued in the refugee camps in West Timor and some East Timorese women had disappeared from the camps. Her organization was concerned that many women had been summarily executed because they were potential witnesses to atrocities committed in East Timor.

13. The United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET) had largely ignored the role of women in the reconstruction effort. East Timorese women were under-represented in national and local decision-making bodies. The Commission should ensure that the United Nations established mechanisms to bring those who had committed crimes against humanity before and during the referendum to justice. She also called for a halt to the violations in the refugee camps.

14. Ms. DIOP (African Commission of Health and Human Rights Promoters) said that the HIV/AIDS pandemic was recognized to be a serious threat to Africa's peace, security and development. Yet, alarming as infection rates in Africa were, even more alarming was the disproportionately high number of African women becoming infected as compared with the rest of the world. The reason African women were so vulnerable to HIV/AIDS was that they had yet to attain their most basic rights. A recent workshop organized by Femmes Africa Solidarité, with the support of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), had made clear that their economic dependency on men, their lack of negotiating power at home and their need to resort to sexual networking in order to sustain themselves made African women much more vulnerable to HIV/AIDS.

15. That already high risk was compounded by the prevalence of violent conflict: rape was increasingly being used as a weapon of war and armed conflict situations forced many women and girls to offer their sexual services. At the same time, there was a profound lack of understanding of the nature of HIV/AIDS: in many communities, AIDS was still an enigma shrouded in dangerous myth. She called on the Commission to intensify efforts to link gender and HIV/AIDS with the promotion of women's human rights in Africa.

16. Mr. SISSON (International Fellowship of Reconciliation) said that his organization welcomed the recent progress on the issue of military sexual slavery by Japan during the Second World War. In her previous reports, the Commission's Special Rapporteur on violence against women had noted that it was not enough to establish a private foundation to compensate victims. Japan had both a moral and a legal responsibility to apologize, and to compensate the victims. Subsequently, the Sub-Commission's Special Rapporteur on systematic rape, sexual slavery and slavery-like practices during armed conflict had suggested some practical means of implementing those recommendations (E/CN.4/Sub.2/1998/13). In the light of Sub-Commission resolution 1999/16, which referred to States' duty to respect their international obligations to prosecute perpetrators and compensate all victims of human rights violations, the lack of response by the Government of Japan was regrettable.

17. His organization suggested that an international truth and reconciliation commission under United Nations supervision could provide a framework for resolving the conflict. Such a commission could address four main concerns on the "comfort women" issue: disclosure of official documents by Japan; testimony of victims and the accountability of perpetrators; an official apology by Japan and admission of moral and legal responsibility; and financial compensation. A framework of that kind would focus on justice and forgiveness rather than on guilt and humiliation, and he urged the Commission to give the proposal its serious consideration.

18. Mrs. POLONOVSKI (International Council of Women) said that, five years after the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action, violence against women persisted and had in some places intensified. Many women were still subjected to systematic violence in the form of forced sterilization, contraception and abortion, including late-term abortion. In Afghanistan and Tibet, women who had had two or more children were routinely sterilized. Penalties for resisting included loss of employment and forfeiture of rights to health care, food and education.

19. Women detainees too, were subject to violence, in the form of long prison terms without trial, beatings, poor medical care and forced exercise. All systematic violence that humiliated women in their womanhood demanded international action. It was deeply regrettable that it was only when violence spiralled out of control that it caught the world's attention.

20. Mr. SARAF (World Muslim Congress) said that most women who suffered discrimination and violence were victims of domestic violence, which cut across class, religion and national and ethnic origin. In many societies it was not reported, in order to protect family honour and, in the absence of legal protection, women suffered in silence. In fact, in some States, legislation actually encouraged violence against women and in others agents of the State itself tortured and abused women.

21. The Commission should take note of the fact that only 7 of the 18 countries to which communications had been transmitted by the Special Rapporteur had responded. The Indian Government's failure to respond to the Special Rapporteur's communications amounted to condoning the Indian army atrocities against women and girls in Jammu and Kashmir.

22. He drew attention to excesses committed against women prisoners in Bermuda, a United Kingdom colony. The Israeli authorities should stop the practice of placing female political prisoners in the same cells as male criminals.

23. Ms. MARGHETICI (Pax Romana), speaking also on behalf of International Young Catholic Students, drew attention to the practice in Equatorial Guinea - which was a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights - of imprisoning women for failing to return the dowry when a marriage was dissolved. Another form of discrimination in the same country was the inequality of access to education, particularly at secondary or university level. Whereas 10 per cent of the male population was illiterate, the figure for women was 30 per cent. The Commission should extend the mandate of its Special Representative on the situation in that country for a further year to monitor the human rights situation there.

24. Prostitution was becoming an increasingly profitable industry. Bought from their relatives at very low prices, girls from Africa, Asia and Central America were taken to the United States of America, Europe and the Middle East, where they were forced into sexual servitude. Led into their situations through ignorance and naivety, they found themselves trapped. It was shameful for humanity that girls and women were sold as objects in the market place.

25. Perpetrators of such crimes were rarely brought to justice. Often a country's legal systems and culture were insufficient. Urgent consideration should be given to international cooperation. At the national level, the authorities in destination countries ought to enact

legislation to protect the victims of trafficking and to facilitate their integration or return to the country of origin. Public education and information programmes should be introduced. In countries where prostitution was authorized, prostitutes should be registered and carry identification, so as to prevent illegal trafficking.

26. Ms. SONG Wenyan (All-China Women's Federation) said that it was encouraging to see the increasingly serious attitude taken by many Governments towards the promotion and protection of human rights. Real progress had been made.

27. Some speakers had mentioned Falun Gong. The fact was that some women had, as a result of practising Falun Gong, committed suicide. In other cases, women had refused medical treatment, left their jobs or come to regard their family members as devils. It was impossible to empower women or strive for their advancement if Falun Gong had drawn them away from economic activities or public affairs. The representative of Freedom House had recently asserted that there were 70 to 100 million Falun Gong practitioners in China. In fact, there were no more than 2 million; the cases Freedom House had mentioned had all been fabricated.

28. Ms. SHAH (Muslim World League) said that, while impressive progress had been made on implementing the Beijing Platform for Action, the Commission and other human rights mechanisms had yet to focus on abuses of women in a number of regions. In the recent past, the women of Chechnya, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Rwanda, Kosovo and Jammu and Kashmir had been subjected to brutality inspired by ethnic cleansing policies. Women and children always suffered worst in armed conflicts. In almost all cultures, raping an opponent's womenfolk was the greatest possible insult. It had therefore been rightly included as a war crime in the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. Her organization hoped that the Statute would act as a deterrent and that the perpetrators of the crime would be brought to justice.

29. The valley of Kashmir resonated with tales of torture and violence, including systematic rape and sexual abuse of the women by the Indian armed forces, which had been given blanket protection by the authorities. She urged the Commission to prevail on India to allow a visit by the Special Rapporteur on violence against women to investigate human rights violations carried out with impunity not only in Kashmir but in other Indian states. The Commission should not ignore a people or a region because its rights were being trampled on by one of the Commission's influential members. Political considerations should be set aside.

30. Mr. WARIKOO (Himalayan Research and Cultural Foundation) drew a contrast between the preparations for the forthcoming special session of the General Assembly and the inhuman treatment still being suffered by women at the hands of Islamist extremists. The situation in Afghanistan was particularly bad in that regard.

31. Islamist extremists had also been committing atrocities against the women of Jammu and Kashmir. Much against the Kashmiri Muslim tradition, the local women were being forced to adopt the fundamentalist way of life, wear the veil and lead a life of seclusion. Girls had been punished for wearing modern clothes and others had been forced into "command marriages", which had resulted in hundreds of unwanted pregnancies. Women were murdered to punish their male relatives. There were at least 10,000 widows in the State. He urged the Commission to set standards on how States should respond to violence against women.

32. Ms. SHAUMIAN (International Institute for Peace) said that women were exposed to some very specific forms of discrimination, one of the worst being "honour killings". Such killings took many forms. Sometimes women had been forced to commit suicide after a public denunciation of their behaviour. Others were disfigured by acid and died of their injuries. An 18-year-old woman had been flogged to death in Bangladesh for "immoral" behaviour. Around 25 women were reported killed for crimes of "honour" each year in Jordan, while the corresponding figure in Pakistan was 300. Only a handful of perpetrators were arrested and the law allowed the victim's heirs to forgive the accused or accept compensation. In almost all cases, the victim was killed by her own family or at its behest.

33. In every civil conflict of the past few years, women of all ages had been targeted for sexual violence. Driven into flight, they had been subjected to sexual and domestic violence in refugee camps as well. The deliberate victimization of women in situations of armed conflict should be considered a crime against humanity and those involved should be held responsible. Women could, however, play an important role in conflict resolution and peace building. Measures should be adopted to use them as peace brokers in armed conflicts.

34. Ms. ALI (Afro-Asian People's Solidarity Organization) said that, in many developing countries, sons were more highly valued than daughters. Women were deprived of equality in all their rights. In Nepalese society, they could be sold by parents or husbands for prostitution in big Indian cities. Another reprehensible traditional practice, in the Mugu district of Nepal, was to keep women before and for a month after the birth of a child in a buffalo shed in poor hygienic conditions.

35. It was estimated that about 95 per cent of pregnant women in Iraq suffered from malnutrition and anaemia. They gave birth to malnourished children which often died. In Bhutan, particularly in the east and south, poverty and illiteracy among women were rife. It was a male-dominated society. Men were officially entitled to keep three wives, but many had up to seven.

36. In Pakistan, sex outside marriage was punishable by death by stoning, up to 10 years' imprisonment, whipping or a fine. The law made no distinction between adultery and rape. Moreover, the age of criminal culpability had been lowered, so that girls as young as 11 could be liable to the most severe punishments. Socially, women in Pakistan were disadvantaged from birth. Girls received less food and had less access to education and health care. Only 28 per cent of girls of primary school age attended school and a mere 11 per cent of older girls. Only some 15 per cent of females could read or write. The incidence of rape and domestic violence was very high. In 1999 alone, 1,000 women had been the victims of "honour killings".

37. Ms. ARIF (Interfaith International) said that in many countries a woman could move about only if accompanied by a male relative. It seemed illogical to claim that women had equality with men but were not adequate for priesthood and to exclude them from certain areas in houses of worship. Many laws discriminating against women derived from religious practice. All the major religions manifested discriminatory treatment of women in some way.

38. Amnesty International reported that 80 per cent of Pakistani women suffered from domestic violence. In many countries women were victims of "honour killings". In Jordan, ,the lower house of Parliament had voted against reducing the penalty for men guilty of such killings, arguing that it would incite social delinquency.

39. The fundamental human right of procreation was in danger in Iraq and in Kosovo. Iraqi women, 10 years after the Gulf War, were suffering from unprecedented spontaneous abortions as a result of chromosome damage caused by the use of depleted uranium ammunition. There was a similar problem in Kosovo.

40. In the Sudan, captured women were being sold into slavery: no other term could be used for a situation in which women had no rights over their own bodies, were not free to leave and were forced into sexual activity with their masters. Kurdish women, too, were subjected to sexual violence as part of Turkey's total warfare against the Kurds. In South Africa, rape was endemic. Her organization urged the leaders of the world's great religions to educate their followers concerning such practices of violence against women.

41. Ms. JAMPA (International Union of Socialist Youth) said that, in some countries, violence against women had intensified, sometimes overtly but, in places where discrimination was also based on race or religion, it could be more covert. In Tibet, women were subjected to systematic violence in the form of forced sterilization, contraception and abortion, including late-term abortion, in violation of articles 1 and 2 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, which China had ratified in 1980. Such actions could not be seen as other than an attempt to reduce the Tibetan population when, at the same time, millions of Chinese were being settled in the area. In one province, it was proposed to reduce the number of children allowed to Tibetans: from two to one for workers and urban residents and from three to two for farmers and herders. It was reported that similar quotas were being imposed in three other provinces. Parents would be subject to penalties or fines for "excess" children.

42. Women detainees suffered beatings, denial of medical care and forced exercise regimes. Nuns - who constituted the vast majority of women political detainees - often suffered uniquely degrading and sexual forms of torture. Beatings were so severe that one nun had lost the sight of an eye, another had gone deaf and a third had been left barely able to walk. In that connection, the Chinese authorities had lied to the Special Rapporteur on violence against women in their response in the case of Ms. Ngawang Sandrol (E/CN.4/2000/68/Add.1, para. 35).

43. The systematic violence against Tibetan women demanded international action and she urged the Commission to intervene. The Tibetan people were working to secure fundamental human rights, including their right to self-determination. If their non-violent campaign failed to command international support, the message would be that only the kind of violence that had occurred in the former Yugoslavia could attract world attention.

44. Ms. SRIVASTAVA (International Institute for Non-aligned Studies) said that the restrictions imposed on women were the result of stereotypes developed over centuries, and it was possible that women contributed to those stereotypes by taking a passive attitude towards the discrimination practised against them. Women had also placed shackles on their own

freedoms, and in many countries, had not banded together to fight for their rights. When they had done so, they had achieved recognition, economic independence and the respect of the male-dominated societies that subjugated them. The ills and discrimination faced by women in many developing countries could be overcome through the education of society as a whole. However, States must provide the structures and facilities that allowed women to be educated and appreciate their own potential.

45. Discrimination was still rife in developed countries, and the situation in developing countries was far worse: custom and tradition were used to relegate the vast majority of women to an inferior position, and religions were distorted for the same purpose. The problem requiring most immediate attention was the plight of women in societies where social and traditional prejudices were consolidated by constitutions and legislation. In such societies, where they were treated as second class citizens, the only option available to women was to band together and assert their rights.

46. Ms. HUANG Ciping (Transnational Radical Party) said that, while both men and women in China had been robbed of most of their basic human rights, the women suffered more than the men. Chinese women did not live equally with men, but were their slaves. Among the many abuses to which they were subjected were forced abortion and sterilization. Millions of baby girls were aborted or abandoned. Women were sold as brides, faced difficulties in finding and keeping employment and female political prisoners were sexually assaulted.

47. The Government organized such crimes against Chinese women and encouraged its officials to carry them out. A dictatorship with such a shameful human rights record could not be expected to respect women's rights. In addition to their own suffering, many Chinese women whose loved ones were among the millions of political prisoners jailed in the country had an additional burden to bear.

48. Just like oppressed women in other parts of the world, Chinese women made sacrifices for the human rights and happiness of the whole human race. In return, they were abused and threatened. They had to bear a disproportionate share of pain and suffering for justice, equality, freedom and human rights.

49. Ms. SHI Yuhong (Association of World Citizens) said that her organization wished to express its dismay at the treatment of female Falun Gong practitioners in China. Violence against such women was widespread and systematic, and reflected a deliberate policy. The violence and abuse was not limited to conditions in prison but also exercised through so-called reform-through-labour camps and mental institutions. While both men and women were harshly punished for publicizing the current state of affairs in China, women were forced to endure gender-specific brutality and humiliation, including many forms of sexual abuse. It was remarkable that the reaction of many women to such systematic violence was one of compassion and forbearance.

50. There were two main aspects to the work of the Commission with respect to violence against women. One was universal, since the establishment of equal relations between men and women was a worldwide task. The other was country-specific, and required an examination of the socio-economic and political context. The Commission must work with every Government

and society in order to overcome violence against women. With regard to China, the Government of that country must revise its ban on the practice of Falun Gong, because that ban had been responsible for a great deal of violence against women.

51. Mr. LITTMAN (Association for World Education) said that, as Commission resolution 1999/82 stated, Islam was frequently and wrongly associated with human rights violations and terrorism. In connection with the so-called honour killings in Pakistan, the Pakistani delegation should assure the Commission that preventive measures were envisaged by the new Government to end those grave violations of women's human rights.

52. A further defamation of Islam was the attempt to link it with female genital mutilation. As he had consistently maintained, the term "traditional or customary practices" was a shameful euphemism for "torture of females". In the Sudan, it was not only the Muslim female population that was subjected to such traumatic violence, but also the victims of "traditional slavery". In southern Sudan, defenceless women and children were displaced in order to facilitate oil drilling and were not only likely to be sold or trafficked, but were deliberately bombarded by the Government with cluster and other bombs when gathering to receive humanitarian aid.

53. His organization endorsed the appeal by Médecins sans Frontières to the Government of the Sudan to cease all such aerial bombings and the trafficking of women and children obtained through so-called traditional slavery practices. It also called on the Commission to condemn the Sudan for such crimes against humanity.

54. Mr. ARIMITSU (Asian Women's Human Rights Council) said that he wished to appeal to the Commission to take renewed action to defend the rights of the so-called comfort women forced into sexual slavery by the Japanese armed forces during the Second World War. As a result of discussions in the Commission, the Sub-Commission and the Working Group on Contemporary Forms of Slavery, the Special Rapporteur on violence against women had recommended that the Government of Japan should make an official apology and provide State compensation to the victims. Notwithstanding those recommendations, there had been no development in the policy of that Government. The women involved would not be satisfied with money provided through a private fund: they had strongly articulated their demand for an unambiguous official apology and individual State compensation for that war crime.

55. An important bill recently introduced in the Japanese Senate would satisfy the women's demands, which were supported by a further recent resolution passed by the House of Representatives in the Philippines. He urged the Commission to support the Japanese bill, which should be welcomed by the international community. He also urged the Commission to endorse Sub-Commission resolution 1999/16, which reiterated that States must respect their international obligations to prosecute perpetrators and compensate all victims of human rights and humanitarian law violations. In view of the age of many of the women in question, urgent action was necessary.

56. Ms. BERAUN (American Association of Jurists) said that her organization welcomed the Optional Protocol that had been adopted to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. However, the Optional Protocol appeared to consider as falling

within its scope only violations of human rights committed by the States parties. It thus excluded private individuals or institutions, other States, international organizations and private international institutions or enterprises.

57. While some might interpret the Optional Protocol as allowing NGOs to submit complaints on behalf of persons or groups of persons, that was not explicitly provided for: the formulation was vague. The clause in which it was stated that a complainant must be under the jurisdiction of the State against which a complaint was made was anachronistic and would hamper the submission of complaints against third States. For example, victims of international trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation, namely, women who were taken from one country to another to be sexually exploited and were subsequently deported, would be unable to file complaints against the latter State because they would not be subject to its jurisdiction.

58. Globalization had established relationships and mutual dependence between all the States of the world. Economic and social phenomena in one State or groups of States could have repercussions on others. It was therefore archaic to ignore the international context when dealing with violations of the human rights of more than half the world's population.

59. The new Optional Protocol, with its limitations, did nothing to remedy the shortcomings of the Convention itself, which provided no protection for women engaged in prostitution, heads of single parent families or women migrant workers. The Optional Protocol had also failed to incorporate the principles laid down in the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, nor did it make any reference to the right of women to rest, to a reasonable working day and to the enjoyment of leisure time.

60. Ms. GUERRERO (Centro de Estudios sobre la Juventud) said that, while violence did exist in Cuba as in all other countries, young people there did not have to worry about the relative advantages of being male or female or to be very concerned about physical or other forms of violence. Young Cubans had, however, been greatly damaged by the blockade imposed on their country. Nevertheless, with the few resources available to it, Cuban society made every endeavour to nurture its young people and to raise their awareness of human rights issues. There was no impunity for abusers or violators of human rights. Cuban women were active and independent, and the worst human rights violation they had to endure was the economic blockade imposed on them by their northern neighbour.

61. Ms. CARCANO (Women's International Democratic Federation) said that little had been done to advance the enjoyment by millions of people of their human rights. She was particularly concerned by the feminization of poverty.

62. The Federation of Cuban Women was affiliated to her own organization, and had done much to promote the active involvement of Cuban women in the political, economic, social and cultural life of the country. She had therefore been concerned to read the report by the Special Rapporteur on violence against women of her visit to Cuba (E/CN.4/2000/68/Add.2), and wished to support the response thereto of the Federation of Cuban Women. There had been no need for

the Special Rapporteur to visit Cuba in order to write her report, since she appeared not to have understood, or to have ignored, the information she had been given in the country. It would have been better if the resources used for her visit had been invested in development.

63. It was insulting for the Special Rapporteur to urge the Cuban Government to look into the law reform with regard to domestic violence that had taken place in other parts of Latin America and thereafter evaluate the need for any amendments in Cuba. She might just as well tell other countries that, since Cuba had done so much to improve the situation of women, those countries should also have a revolution.

64. Mr. LU Xingchong (China Society for Human Rights) said that the Commission should pay special attention to all women victims of cults. His own wife had become a committed follower of Falun Gong, and as a result had refused medical treatment for her poor health. When she was unable to bear her pain any longer, she committed suicide. He believed that more than 1,000 people in China had died as a result of obeying Falun Gong teaching with regard to medical treatment. The cult was responsible for violating human rights, disrupting society and inflicting pain and misery on thousands of families. He found it difficult to understand why the United States Government should shelter the cult leader or use the cult as an excuse to attack his country.

65. Ms. AROCHA DOMÍNGUEZ (Federation of Cuban Women) said that women had made considerable progress in the economic, social and political life of Cuba and accounted for 43.6 per cent of the labour force and 59 per cent of university graduates. They held a high proportion of professional, scientific and management posts, and 27.6 per cent of parliamentarians were women. At its most recent Congress, her organization had recognized the correctness of the Cuban Government's policies to improve the status of women and had made recommendations whereby the effectiveness of the relevant legislation could be further enhanced.

66. Cuban women were, however, indignant at the lack of objectivity and professionalism in the report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women on her mission to Cuba (E/CN.4/2000/68/Add.2). It was a clear case of bad faith and distortion to discredit the Cuban Government. The Special Rapporteur's inappropriate assertions and superficial judgements undermined the credibility of such visits. Cuba did not need Special Rapporteurs; it was capable of resolving its own problems. What it did need was an end to the economic sanctions and agressive policies towards Cuba, which were having such a severe impact on Cuban women.

67. Mr. NARANG (Indian Council of Education) drew attention to large-scale violations of women's human rights throughout the world. Gender-based violence continued to be viewed as a women's - rather than a human rights - issue. The international women's human rights movement had succeeded in raising the visibility of abuses against women, and the international community had made welcome statements in support of women's human rights. However, the gap between rhetoric and reality was vast. As many as 1.5 billion people were living in poverty, 70 per cent of whom were women. Moreover, their participation in economic and political decision-making was still very limited. Women occupied only 10 per cent of parliamentary seats throughout the world and accounted for less than 5 per cent of heads of State.

68. It was particularly intolerable that the law of some countries denied women their basic rights to health care, education, work and participation in public life. In recent years, with the growth of State-sponsored fundamentalism, there had even been a shift away from the rhetoric of equal rights for women, with the enactment of legislation which actually withdrew legal and political rights women had already won.

69. Ms. TALBOT (World Federation of Trade Unions) said that deliberate discrimination against women continued to abound in the twenty-first century. Even in the most economically advanced countries, women were treated as sex objects rather than as men's equals. At least such societies had developed the necessary avenues for redress.

70. For the most part, the problem was no longer one of awareness, but of discriminatory attitudes fortified by legal and institutional structures. Such was the case in Pakistan, where over 1,000 women had been subjected to honour killings in 1999 alone. Taliban ideology was fast gaining ground in that country, threatening the future rights of Pakistani women.

71. A woman's greatest trauma was seeing her children deprived, physically or mentally. The child soldiers of Africa, the trainee soldiers of Pakistan and Afghanistan, those crippled by landmines or mourning the death of their parents at the hands of terrorists, also formed part of the burden of modern women.

72. The international community must take immediate action to end fundamentalist terrorism and violence, including by sanctioning States whose structures encouraged intolerance and discrimination against women, particularly in the name of religion. A global women's organization should be established to examine the behaviour of States towards women.

73. Ms. FAIZA (Union Nationale de la Femme Tunisienne) said she welcomed the efforts of the United Nations to integrate the human rights of women into its activities. Tunisian women were protected by a Constitution that guaranteed equality between the sexes. Equality, development and peace were three key concepts for her organization, which sought abolition of the marital vow of obedience, and tougher punishments for domestic violence.

74. Tunisian women saw peace as essential to development, and supported women's peace efforts throughout the world. For women to exert full political pressure, however, they must be heard not merely as an electorate, but as elected decision makers. Only then might democracies be built in which men and women participated equally. Women should join forces worldwide to achieve that end.

75. Ms. DARGEL (World Organization of Former Pupils of Catholic Education), drawing attention to paradoxes in the modern world, which computers would be hard put to unravel, said that States signatory to human rights instruments remained unsatisfactory in terms of their overall enforcement, that the military escaped punishment in certain countries for sexual crimes and that, elsewhere, massacres and executions were an integral part of State policy. Meanwhile, genital surgery practised on girls transformed an act of joy into one of suffering. Her organization welcomed the efforts of the Secretary-General to mainstream human rights throughout the United Nations system and to investigate gross violations of children's rights.

76. Mr. ZHANG Lei (China), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that the accusations of a certain NGO were not even worth refuting. "New China" had empowered millions of Chinese women, who enjoyed all human rights and fundamental freedoms on equal footing with men. The Dalai Lama was a representative of "darkest serfdom"; neither he nor his supporters were qualified to speak of human rights. Under the Dalai Lama, Tibetans had lived an "inhuman life", as reflected in Tibet's legal code of the time. It was thus preposterous for the Dalai Lama to set himself up as a human rights defender.

RIGHTS OF THE CHILD (agenda item 13) (E/CN.4/2000/69, 72, 73 and Add.1-3, 74, 75 and 128; E/CN.4/2000/NGO/21, 35, 57, 59, 82, 88, 127 and 142; CRC/C/84, 87 and 90)

77. Mr. OTUNNU (Under-Secretary-General, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children in Armed Conflict), introducing his reports (E/CN.4/2000/71 and A/54/430), said that two primary objectives had propelled his advocacy work. The first was to build a worldwide social and political movement for the protection of war-affected children in order to reverse the trends of widespread abuse and brutalization of children in armed conflict. The second was to instigate a critical mass of activities and initiatives for the benefit of children - both in the midst and in the aftermath of armed conflict - which would become self-sustaining well beyond his mandate.

78. The international community should call on all warring factions in all ongoing conflicts to stop fighting, for the sake of children, for a period of one week in the calendar. That week would be devoted to child protection and the promotion of peace. More than symbolic, it would enable the international community to provide relief and vaccinations to war-affected children. Moreover, young people themselves should be involved, inter alia in a children-to-children network between children in war-affected countries and their counterparts from countries at peace.

79. He was delighted that a consensus agreement had finally been reached on raising the minimum age for recruitment and participation in conflict from 15 to 18. Although the consensus could have gone further, it represented a victory for children, and an important step towards eliminating the use of children as soldiers. With agreement on the optional protocol in place, the focus should be on making a difference on the ground by: exerting concerted international pressure on parties to conflicts, addressing the political, social and economic factors that facilitated the exploitation of children as soldiers, mobilizing more resources to respond to the rehabilitation needs of ex-child soldiers, and broadening the scope of concern to embrace all children affected by conflict.

80. With a view to bringing impunity for egregious violations of children's rights in conflicts to an end, all aspects of peace processes should highlight the abuses perpetrated on children during conflict. The perpetrators, moreover, must not be exempted from responsibility when amnesty legislation was contemplated. The international community should also press for application of the provisions of Security Council resolution 1261 of August 1999, which represented a momentous development for the cause of children affected by armed conflict.

81. With a view to ensuring that child protection was integrated into United Nations peace and security activities, he had been working to ensure that: relevant reports to the

Security Council reflected the situation of children as a matter of course, training on the rights and protection of children and women was provided to all peace operation personnel, and senior officers were appointed in the capacity of Child Protection Advisers (CPAs), as was already the case in Sierra Leone and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

82. The international community currently had at its disposal an impressive body of international instruments providing for the protection of children in armed conflict. The time had come to work together in a concerted manner to develop awareness-raising and other activities, in order to ensure the application of those norms on the ground.

The meeting rose at 1.00 p.m.